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ABSTRACT

A study examined four exemplary elementary schools that have successfully implemented language development programs for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students as part of a school-wide restructuring effort. The schools are: Del Norte Heights Elementary (El Paso, Texas); Hollibrook Elementary (Houston, Texas); Linda Vista Elementary (San Diego, California); and Inter-American School (Chicago, Illinois). All have non-traditional school organizations, a well-developed language acquisition program for LEP students, and a high-quality language arts curricula. The analysis presented here synthesizes data from telephone and on-site interviews with teachers, principals, and district staff, focus groups with students and parents, and classroom observation. Shared elements of the programs include: school reorganization to support improved teaching and learning for all students, including LEP students; adaptation in response to LEP student needs; access to challenging content for LEP students; engagement of LEP students with English-speaking peers; innovative curricular strategies, including whole language, literature-based curriculum, and thematic, integrated curriculum; and innovative instructional strategies, including cooperative learning, active learning, and experiential. Contains 11 references. (MSE)

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LEARNING ENGLISH: HOW SCHOOL REFORM FOSTERS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

BERYL NELSON

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Learning English: How School Reform Fosters Language Acquisition and Development for Limited English Proficient Elementary School Students

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Overview

Many schools across the nation are facing the challenge of educating students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who have limited English proficiency. This paper examines four exemplary elementary schools that have successfully implemented language development programs for limited English proficient (LEP) students as part of a schoolwide restructuring effort. These exemplary schools—in California, Texas, and Illinois—were selected on the basis of a national nomination process. All have nontraditional school organizations, a well-developed language acquisition program for LEP students, and high-quality language arts curricula. The analysis presented here synthesizes data about the four schools gathered from telephone interviews and on-site interviews with teachers, principals, and district staff. Research staff also conducted focus groups with students and parents and observed instruction in selected classrooms.

Although each school takes an individual approach to language acquisition and development, they share the following elements: (a) They have changed the organization of the school in ways that support improved teaching and learning for all students, including LEP students; (b) they have adapted their programs for LEP students in response to their students' needs; (c) they have provided LEP students access to challenging content; (d) they have engaged LEP students with their English-only peers; (e) they have implemented innovative curricular strategies including whole language, literature-based curriculum, and thematic, integrated curriculum; and (f) they have implemented innovative instructional strategies including cooperative learning, active learning, and experiential instructional strategies.

In undertaking a process of education reform, these schools have been able to tailor their programs to meet the needs of their students. They have instituted innovative organizational structures that have specific pedagogical benefits for LEP students while at the same time creating a mission and vision for the school that embraces all students.

Introduction

Today, at least one in five school children in the United States comes from a language minority household, in which a language other than English is spoken. As English is not the first language of many of these children, they enter elementary school with limited English proficiency. Most limited English proficient (LEP) students attend schools in poor neighborhoods, and an unacceptably high proportion of LEP and other language minority students do not complete high school.

For many years, schools have used a variety of approaches to assist LEP students in learning English and other academic subjects. Recently, some schools have been experimenting with new curricular and instructional approaches and new types of organization that education reform advocates believe will offer all students a richer, more rigorous education. But it is not clear whether, and how, school reform trends can benefit students who are not yet proficient in English. Administrators and teachers who are trying to incorporate these new approaches into their programs for LEP students have few guidelines or examples to follow.

This educational practice report describes a research project[1] that identified and analyzed exemplary school programs for LEP students. These schools offer LEP students access to the same kinds of challenging curriculum as are available to students already proficient in English. This paper describes language arts programs in four elementary schools, focusing on the upper elementary grades. The project also investigated four other schools that offer exemplary mathematics and science programs to LEP students in the middle school grades; those programs are described in Educational Practice Report No. 17: *Learning Science and English: How School Reform Advances Scientific Learning for Limited English Proficient Middle School Students* (Minicucci, 1996).

Method

The eight schools chosen for intensive examination were selected through a comprehensive nationwide search. First, nominations were solicited from knowledgeable people at the national, state, and local levels. Nominators were asked to identify exemplary language arts programs in Grades 4 through 6 and exemplary science and math programs in Grades 6 through 8 for LEP students. One hundred fifty-six schools were initially nominated, from the 20 states with the largest populations of LEP students. Approximately two thirds were language arts sites and one third were mathematics or science sites.

Next, the study team screened 75 of the most promising nominated sites, using telephone interviews to identify schools that exhibited excellence with regard to three major criteria: (1) high quality language arts,

mathematics, or science programs for LEP students, (2) significant school restructuring, and (3) implementation of a well-designed English language acquisition program.

The results of the telephone interviews were used to reduce the number of sites that had potential for in-depth study to 25. Demographic, geographic, and programmatic variables were used to select 15 schools for a one-day preliminary field visit to determine which programs would become the final case study sites.

Based on these preliminary visits, eight schools were selected for more intensive field work. Data on student outcomes that are comparable across the sites were not available, in large part because LEP students are often not given the standardized tests (in English) that districts or states require of most students (Berman et al., 1992). Therefore, the research team cannot demonstrate quantitatively that the eight case study sites are exemplary in the sense of demonstrated evidence of significantly higher student achievement scores. Nevertheless, the nomination, screening, and field visits all led to the conclusion that these schools were highly innovative and followed practices that are considered by researchers to provide outstanding learning opportunities for LEP and all students.

This selection process provided clues to implementation problems and challenges that schools must overcome if they are to serve LEP students effectively. Many schools nominated as exemplary did not meet the criteria for inclusion. In some cases, schools with good reputations failed to continue their exemplary efforts when they lost key personnel, most often the principal or a bilingual resource teacher. In other cases, several of the schools nominated had only one exemplary class for LEP students led by an outstanding teacher, but this class was isolated from the overall school program.

A team of three to four researchers spent three to four days at each case study site, observing classes; interviewing the principal, site administrators, and teachers; and conducting focus groups with LEP students and parents of LEP students. District-level officials were interviewed at each site as were personnel of external partner organizations. External partners included non-profit organizations, federally funded science projects, private curriculum and staff development organizations, corporate-sponsored organizations, and university schools of education. Table 1 provides a demographic overview of the four elementary schools selected for their exemplary language arts programs, and each is profiled briefly below.

Del Norte Heights Elementary School

Del Norte Heights is located in the Ysleta Independent School District of El Paso, Texas, a city of 600,000 on the United States–Mexico border. The Rio Grande separates El Paso from Ciudad Juarez, its sister city in

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EXEMPLARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

	Del Norte Heights El Paso, TX	Hollibrook Houston, TX	Linda Vista San Diego, CA	Inter-American Chicago, IL
Grade levels	K-6	preK-5	preK-6	preK-8
Enrollment	650	1000	950	650
% LEP Students	40%	67%	66%	36%
LEP students' language diversity	100% Spanish	100% Spanish	50% Spanish; 22% Hmong; 16% Vietnamese; 6% Lao	100% Spanish
% free or reduced-price lunch	85%	87%	88%	56%

Mexico. The metropolitan area, composed of El Paso, Juarez, and the suburbs of each city, is home to more than 2 million people.

The 27-year-old single-story school building is located in a neighborhood of well maintained houses only blocks from the freeway that bisects the city. Del Norte is a neighborhood school, and a number of students are second generation Del Norte students. Some parents even bring their children from other areas of the city where they now live and drop them off at the homes of grandparents who still live in the Del Norte Heights neighborhood.

The school is well maintained inside and out, and the principal and office staff greet students and visiting parents by name, in English and in Spanish. The school has 50 staff members, including teachers, support staff, a counselor, and a nurse. The student population is very stable; few students arrive in the middle of the year and many students enter at kindergarten and remain throughout the elementary school years. An estimated 6% of the LEP students are recent immigrants; most are literate in Spanish and have had fairly consistent schooling in Mexico, but a small number arrive without Spanish literacy.

The parents of most students work in blue-collar jobs; a significant number of students are from single-parent households. A recently built apartment complex in the neighborhood houses families who are stationed at Fort Bliss, one of the local U.S. military institutions.

Hollibrook Elementary School

Located in the Spring Branch Independent School District of Houston, Texas, Hollibrook has a relatively stable student population. Student turnover, which used to be more than 100% annually, is now about 30%. Eighty-five percent of the students are Hispanic, 12% are non-Hispanic White, and 3% are African American.

The Hollibrook community is relatively homogeneous economically, consisting largely of blue-collar workers and laborers. Most families of LEP students are first generation immigrants from Mexico, whereas the children were generally born in the United States. The school is surrounded by large apartment complexes, where residents are challenged by major security and drug factors. Across the street from the school is an empty apartment complex that is boarded up and scheduled for demolition. The economic decline of Houston in the 1980s led to the abandonment of this neighborhood by middle-class families, followed by a large influx of poor families attracted by the low rents. The dense population of mainly minority families has little access to recreational facilities, parks, libraries, or other civic amenities. Students are exposed to violence on the street and sometimes in the home. The school campus is the site for a new park playground that is being built in collaboration with the city.

Linda Vista Elementary School

Linda Vista is located in an inner-city neighborhood of San Diego, California that is composed of government housing, inexpensive apartments, and public housing projects. The neighborhood is a point of entry for new immigrants who move on as they gain an economic foothold in their new country. This transiency has meant constant change in the distribution of languages spoken at the school. Spanish-speaking LEP students have always made up a large fraction of the enrollment, and in recent years their numbers have been increasing. At the same time, the number of other languages spoken by Linda Vista students has increased as political and economic refugees from Southeast Asia and other parts of the world move into the area. Students' parents typically work in low-skill jobs, and many are unemployed. The neighborhood has significant problems with gang activity.

The student population is 44% Hispanic (mostly from Mexico and Central America), 38% Indochinese (Hmong, Vietnamese, and Laotian), 7% non-Hispanic White, 5% African American, 3% Filipino, 2% Asian, and 1% "other."

Inter-American School

Inter-American is located in Chicago, Illinois, in a neighborhood of single-family homes, older apartment buildings, and multiple-family houses. The school building is a three-story structure that shows signs of aging but is nonetheless warm and welcoming. Outside is a new play area with modern plastic playground equipment and sand pits.

Inter-American is a district-wide two-way immersion (English-Spanish) magnet school that attracts students from all parts of the district. The school was founded 20 years ago by a group of parents and teachers at a bilingual preschool who wanted to create a bilingual elementary school experience for their children. Each class at the school enrolls about half Spanish-dominant and half English-dominant students. Parents must apply to send their children to Inter-American, and for many years the popular school has had more applicants than it could accept. Because the school is a magnet program, the diversity of the student population is controlled by the district. A computer lottery is held to select students to maintain an ethnic and gender balance. Separate quotas are established for each ethnic group and for male and female students within each group.

The student population at Inter-American is 69% Hispanic, 17% non-Hispanic White, 13% African American, and the remaining students are Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native American. Of the LEP students, about 30% are from Mexico, 25% from Puerto Rico, 5% from Cuba, and 27% from other Latin American countries. The school's population is remarkably stable; only a few students leave before eighth grade.

Characteristics of Exemplary Schools

Although the four elementary schools studied in this project vary widely, their programs share certain broad characteristics.

- They are engaged in a process of restructuring to support improved teaching and learning for all students.
- They have a comprehensive language acquisition program.
- They offer a challenging language arts curriculum.

School Organization

All of the elementary schools have taken significant steps toward restructuring. As a result, each school differs markedly from the usual ways that schools are organized and operate. Elementary schools traditionally have been organized into self-contained classrooms with teachers who work independently of one another. Administrative and decision-making processes have almost always been top-down, dominated by an often distant district office, a structure that offers little opportunity for meaningful involvement of teachers, parents, or the community. In contrast, these four elementary schools have organized teachers and students in innovative ways, have devised creative ways to extend instructional time, have embarked on new avenues of teacher collaboration and school governance, and have reached out to involve and assist families.

Two of the exemplary schools have created organizational structures that facilitate increased interaction between teachers and students. Hollibrook offers continuum classes, in which a teacher and a group of

students remain together for several years. Teachers of LEP students also regularly team teach with teachers of English-proficient students. Students from the two groups are combined for some instructional activities and separated into native-language groups for other activities. Team teaching in the context of continuum classes allows Hollibrook teachers to work together for several years and become a proficient team.

Linda Vista breaks the traditional mold completely. The school is divided into four ungraded instructional "wings": Each wing is organized by developmental stages (early childhood, primary, middle, and upper) and spans two to three traditional grade levels. The wings function like four schools within a school; each wing is composed of students who have mixed levels of English language fluency and previous schooling and who are relatively close in age. Within each wing, students are grouped by home language or English language level for language arts, English as a second language (ESL), and social studies instruction. The wing structure allows the school to modify the rigid age/grade structure of traditional schools and to respond appropriately to the developmental needs of individual LEP students and other students.

The exemplary schools organize time during the school day and the school year in innovative ways that serve to maximize classroom time for learning, protect blocks of time for in-depth learning activities, extend the school day, and extend the school year. One way that the schools use instructional time productively is by giving teachers control over their daily schedule. For example, at Hollibrook, grade-level teaching teams decide together when students take physical education, music, and health education from specialists. The teams use these times to meet together and plan their teaching. Control over their schedule, for example, allows continuum teachers to devote segments of 90 minutes to two hours for Writer's Workshop or Reader's Workshop activities.

Another way that schools make efficient use of time is by creating a schoolwide schedule with blocks set aside for core content areas. Linda Vista devotes a two-hour block each morning to language arts classes organized by English fluency level. A shorter morning block is devoted to mathematics. Similarly, Del Norte schedules long blocks of time for language arts and mathematics four days a week. On Fridays, students spend the full day studying science and social studies.

The schools have also found ways to extend students' learning time beyond class hours to give LEP students extra time to learn. At Del Norte, classroom teachers provide after-school tutoring twice a week for 45 minutes. Students who need more reading support also participate in an after-school reading program. Del Norte also offers a four-week summer school program. Linda Vista operates on a year-round, single-track calendar to eliminate long summer breaks that impede the progress of English language learners. The school also offers short courses during school vacations.

At the exemplary schools, time is also built into teachers' daily schedules to allow for joint planning with other teachers. Inter-American and Linda Vista have lengthened the school day four days a week in order to dismiss students early on the fifth day to allow time for joint planning. Linda Vista teachers also have a preparation period each day, made possible by flexible staffing arrangements; teachers frequently use this time to go into another teacher's class to observe the implementation of a new instructional strategy.

Teachers at the exemplary schools regularly collaborate not only in planning instruction and time schedules, but also in shaping the professional development activities at their schools. The exemplary schools systematically use professional development that is designed and planned by the teachers themselves, to ensure that teachers discover, learn, and implement new approaches to language development for LEP students.

The exemplary schools value parent involvement and have developed innovative strategies to engage parents of LEP students in the education of their children. Differences in language and culture often create divisions between school staff and parents of LEP children. The exemplary schools strive to overcome this division by sending home materials in each student's home language, and by making an effort to hire office staff and designate parent liaisons who speak the languages of the parents. Several schools have also dedicated a room at the school as a parent center and offer English and other educational classes to parents. The schools also provide, or assist parents in obtaining, needed health and social services.

The restructuring elements described above combine differently in each school to form a coherent foundation for improved teaching and learning for LEP students. In contrast to some schools undergoing restructuring, in which the program for LEP students remains substantially unchanged while innovations reach English-proficient students (Olsen, 1988), these four elementary schools have a schoolwide vision for change that includes all students, regardless of their English proficiency. This is evident in the way in which these schools help students learn English and become highly skilled in reading and writing.

Language Acquisition

Each school exhibits a unique approach to assisting LEP students in learning English while also teaching them core academic material. Schools have developed LEP programs in response to their specific demographic context, the preferences of parents of LEP students, district and state policies for LEP student programs, and the school's vision for its educational program (Berman et al., 1992). All of the schools offer primary-language-based LEP student programs; one of the four employs both sheltered instruction and primary language instruction.

One of the most important considerations in designing a language acquisition program is the number of non-English languages represented in

the student population. Schools enrolling LEP students from a single language background have a wider range of programmatic options than do schools enrolling LEP students from multiple language groups (Berman et al., 1992). Each of the four exemplary schools has a concentration of Spanish-speaking LEP students and each has developed bilingual programs that rely on the primary language for instruction. Three of the case study schools follow one of two models of bilingual language instruction: transitional bilingual and two-way bilingual. Both approaches are designed to help students acquire English skills and learn academic material at the same time.

Primary Language Instruction: Transitional Bilingual. Both Hollibrook and Del Norte use a transitional bilingual approach to help LEP students acquire English. Students are instructed primarily in Spanish in the early grades, with the proportion of Spanish instruction gradually decreasing and the proportion of English increasing as they move up the grades. For example, at Del Norte, LEP kindergarteners receive 90% of their instruction in Spanish, third graders 60%, and fourth graders 20%. By the end of the fourth grade, most Del Norte LEP students who entered at kindergarten or first grade are ready for all-English instruction.

Primary Language Instruction: Two-Way Bilingual. One school, Inter-American, has a two-way bilingual program, the goal of which is to develop bilingual, biliterate students. English-dominant and Spanish-dominant students study together to become proficient in both English and Spanish while following the regular elementary school curriculum. Such programs are sometimes called dual language, developmental bilingual, or double immersion. The box below describes how the program works at Inter-American.

> ***Inter-American's Two-Way Bilingual Design***
>
> *At all grade levels, English-dominant and Spanish-dominant students are mixed in the same classroom in roughly equal proportions. The program is based on the philosophy that bilingualism and biliteracy are assets and that with exposure and motivation, children can learn another language. Inter-American's program begins in pre-kindergarten with core subjects taught in Spanish. In the early grades, about 80% of instruction is in Spanish. Spanish-dominant students receive ESL instruction and English-dominant students receive instruction in Spanish as a second language. The 80/20 ratio of Spanish-to-English instruction remains through third grade, with instruction of all core subjects in Spanish. English instruction increases in the middle grades through eighth grade, with instruction divided 50/50 between the two languages.*

English-Based Models: Sheltered Instruction. Del Norte, Hollibrook, and Inter-American all enroll LEP students primarily from a Spanish-language background. Linda Vista, in contrast, has a significant number of speakers of various Southeast Asian languages as well as Spanish. Developing a high-quality program for a student population

with multiple primary languages is a complex challenge. Linda Vista provides primary-language support through aides fluent in Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese, and a Vietnamese bilingual teacher, but relies for the most part on a sheltered instruction approach, in which LEP students are instructed in English adjusted to their level of fluency. The box below illustrates how Linda Vista's approach to language acquisition has changed in response to changing school demographics.

Linda Vista Responds to the Changes in the Language Development Needs of its Students

When Linda Vista began its restructuring process, the Spanish-speaking LEP population was decreasing and the number of LEP students speaking different (primarily Southeast Asian) languages was on the rise. In response to this change in the student population, the Linda Vista staff implemented a sheltered instruction program (with a native-language component in Spanish, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Lao) for all LEP students. The selection of the sheltered model was the direct result of the dramatic shift in the languages spoken by LEP students and the declining Spanish-speaking LEP population. A few years later, the Spanish-speaking population began to grow again and the influx of Asian immigrants began to level off. Because they once again had a critical mass of Spanish-speaking students, as well as access to Spanish-speaking bilingual teachers, the staff reinstated bilingual instruction for the Spanish-speaking LEP students while continuing to use a sheltered instruction approach with non-Spanish-speaking LEP students.

Linda Vista has ungraded sheltered classes for students speaking languages other than Spanish. Students are grouped in the classes according to their English language fluency: Sheltered A, Sheltered B, Transition A, and Transition B classes are available for primary (1-2), middle (3-4), and upper (5-6) elementary grades. High-quality sheltered programs provide access to core content for LEP students while developing their English skills. Sheltered instruction is often used, as at Linda Vista, when there are insufficient numbers of students speaking a single language to allow primary language instruction.

Sheltered instruction at Linda Vista relies on a variety of gestures, visual aids, and other instructional techniques to convey meaning in the classroom. Teachers overcome language barriers by previewing lessons, identifying critical vocabulary words needed for the lesson, using key words and phrases consistently, and providing frequent examples. They also use body language and clearly enunciated oral English. Although instruction in sheltered classes is conducted in English, some teachers speak the primary language of students and can clarify meaning for students when necessary.

Language Arts and Curriculum

At the four elementary schools in this study, language arts development is considered as important for LEP students as English language

acquisition. Within the schools' bilingual and sheltered instruction programs, LEP students are guided naturally into developing the kind of advanced English literacy skills needed for academic success in middle and high school. Teachers adapt innovative language arts strategies that are commonly used with monolingual English speakers, such as whole language and literature-based programs, to the needs of LEP students so they can become skillful readers, writers, and thinkers while they are learning English. Using these approaches in a bilingual setting also aids students in developing literacy skills in their native language. Teachers at the exemplary schools also employ some traditional approaches to language arts aimed at teaching phonics and grammar.

The literature-based and whole language approaches to language development used in these schools focus on encouraging students to use language to communicate meaningfully and naturally about relevant topics, instead of having students study about language using worksheets and drills. These approaches introduce literary concepts and develop students' literary skills in the context of a rich and authentic children's literature. Such approaches also emphasize writing and re-writing as a process that guides students into cogent written expression and clear thinking. The following language development strategies are among those used at the exemplary schools.

Writer's Workshop. Writer's Workshop teaches writing through an iterative process that involves multiple steps, including the development of a first draft, reflection, peer and teacher review, and a final product. Teachers use the Writer's Workshop strategy to develop both English and primary language literacy skills.

Hollibrook's second grade bilingual continuum class, which is team taught by two bilingual teachers, consists of both LEP students and monolingual English speakers. The students in the class have been together with the same teachers since kindergarten. During Writer's Workshop, students devote an hour to their writing projects. The teachers have used the same format for Writer's Workshop with the students since kindergarten, so the pattern is familiar to them. As a result, students know what is expected and are able to function as independent learners. Teachers circulate among the students, asking questions and helping students sharpen their writing. Teachers coach Spanish speakers in Spanish about their English writing, helping them to express their thoughts in correct English grammar and vocabulary.

Reader's Workshop. Like Writer's Workshop, this strategy encourages students to work independently of teacher direction, to be reflective, and to consult with peers. Reader's Workshop outlines a process for thoughtful reading and enhanced comprehension. Process steps include asking the meaning of words, summarizing, using personal experience, and making predictions.

At Hollibrook, one hour of the two-hour block for language arts in the fourth grade bilingual class is devoted to Reader's Workshop. The students in this class have been together with the same teacher since kindergarten; as a result, they are expert cooperative learners and understand what is expected of them. Reader's Workshop gives the students practice in speaking English to each other while talking about books. During observation by the researchers, the fourth graders were reading *Where the Broken Heart Still Beats* (Meyer, 1992). Students worked in pairs and alternated activities: The first student read a paragraph aloud to the partner and the partner described what reading strategies were being used; then the students switched roles.

Accelerated Reading. Accelerated Reading is a program that was developed at the University of Wisconsin to increase student reading and comprehension. At Del Norte, third through sixth grade students choose a reading goal every six weeks and read the targeted number of pages in books they select. Reading is done outside of class and can be done in English or in Spanish. In order to receive credit for pages read, students take a computer-based comprehension test on each book; the computer maintains a cumulative record for each child.

During this research project, Del Norte students gradually increased the goals they set for themselves from 300 pages every six weeks to 900 pages. The school librarian reported that the demand for books escalated during the year. Teachers found that students were engaged in their reading and were willing to try increasingly sophisticated books. Teachers felt the program increased reading comprehension and a love of reading and provided exposure to a wide variety of experiences through books.

The box on the next page gives examples of other language arts strategies that incorporate whole language principles.

Cooperative Learning Strategies. Teachers at the exemplary schools make extensive use of cooperative groups in language arts activities. These small student-learning groups, in which four to six students work together to accomplish a specific task, emphasize collaboration and are facilitated, not directed, by the teacher. As a result, the students have the opportunity to co-inquire with their peers and their teacher. The teacher functions as a coach and offers critical guidance rather than answers or solutions.

In the traditional classroom, most instruction is conducted in a whole-class format and most work is completed individually and often competitively. In contrast, cooperative learning resembles the way people work and interact in the workplace and in families. Classrooms that are organized to make effective use of students working together can better prepare students for more complex environments. Working in cooperative groups affords students greater opportunities to become more active participants in the

Exemplary Sites Implement a Variety of Whole Language Strategies

Story Maps. Students create a map that shows the physical landscape of a book or a story. In the process of creating the map, the students become much more involved in the action of a story than they would by only reading it. Students also develop an understanding of sequencing because they are asked to represent the chronological action of the story in a spatial arrangement.

In one of the exemplary classrooms, during a site visit, students were engaged in a complex use of a story map. The class was reading *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985), and as part of a cooperative learning assignment, students were asked to identify Sarah's path across the country. Each group selected a state through which Sarah traveled as she moved westward. The group traced the path through the state, identifying the site of major action in the book. In addition, students were responsible for learning about the state's demography and economy, both at the time of the story and at present.

Literary Letters. The teacher assigns students to write a letter to a character in a book as a way to encourage the students to draw inferences from the story and to promote understanding of the character's motivations. In one of the exemplary classrooms, students were asked to write a letter from James to his aunts in the novel, *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 1961). The assignment required students to understand the nature of the interaction between James and his aunts. The students were asked to explain why the aunts' treatment of James was upsetting to him, and to give the aunts reasons why they should treat James better.

Reader's Theater. Students use dramatic interpretation to make part of a story come to life. A group of students stand or sit together and deliver lines of dialogue from the text. A moderator reads the narrative portions. This activity helps both the "actors" and the listeners develop greater comprehension of the story. Students are asked not just to identify with a character but to become that character.

In one of the exemplary classrooms, students in a bilingual class used the Reader's Theater process. Students who were learning English were the actors in the Reader's Theater and presented the story to their classmates using the techniques of dramatic reading. The teacher served as a guide to the story, asking the actors to pause occasionally in their reading of the narrative to ensure that all students could understand the text.

At another one of the exemplary schools, fourth graders in a bilingual class read *James and the Giant Peach* in English if they were able to do so while others read it in Spanish. The teacher first discussed themes in the book in Spanish with the Spanish readers separately. The teacher then asked students in one cooperative group to perform a portion of the book in a Reader's Theater for the entire class, and assigned each student a role. Students enacted a scene from the book, reading in English. The teacher asked the students in English to describe what happened in the scene and what they thought the characters might feel about different aspects of the story. Throughout the discussion with the entire class, the teacher asked some of the same questions in English that she had previously asked the small group in Spanish.

learning process and requires that they assume greater responsibility for their own learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990; Roy, 1990; Slavin, 1990). Cooperative learning strategies are particularly effective with LEP students because they provide valuable opportunities for students to use language skills in a setting that is less threatening than speaking before the class as a whole. Cooperative learning groups promote student language use in relation to a subject area, serving the dual purpose of enhancing language development and understanding core content.

At most of the exemplary sites, teachers emphasize the two fundamental features of true cooperative learning: positive interdependence and individual accountability. In some ways, these two features are extremely similar. Positive interdependence means that members of the group must assume collective responsibility for the group task and must understand that

individual members cannot succeed unless the whole group succeeds (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990). Individual accountability means that the success of the group depends on the learning of individual students; each group member must understand that he or she must contribute to the group process (Roy, 1990).

Study schools used cooperative learning strategies in a number of interesting and creative ways. Teachers skillfully designed, organized, and facilitated work that utilized group strengths, mitigated individual student weaknesses, and engaged the students in actively pursuing knowledge. Often teachers deliberately mixed students with varying levels of English fluency and literacy in one group so that students who were less fluent could learn from those who were more proficient in English. Teachers often assigned roles to group members for cooperative activities and rotated those roles across assignments. Students were assigned to be facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, and so forth, and took their roles seriously. The entire class was trained in the process of carrying out each of these roles.

Successful cooperative learning groups require that students have an understanding of process steps and have been prepared for relating to each other with respect. At most of the exemplary sites, students had multiple years of experience with cooperative learning strategies. By the time they were in fourth grade or above, they were proficient cooperative learners who had mastered the process. Minimal time was wasted in these classrooms on organizing groups for instruction or keeping students focused on the learning assignment. Because students were effective cooperative learners, teachers were able to devote precious instructional time to productive activity rather than to classroom management or discipline. See box below for a description of a cooperative learning activity at Del Norte Heights Elementary School.

Del Norte Heights 5th Graders Collaborate in Study of Eclipse

Fifth-grade student groups at Del Norte were assigned the task of designing a device for safe viewing of an upcoming solar eclipse. They were also asked to explore a myth about the eclipse and examine how light from the eclipse might damage the eye. Having learned about the dangers of viewing an eclipse directly, each student group brainstormed ways of designing a device that would allow them to view it safely. The student groups demonstrated their understanding of the physics of designing such a device, the anatomy of the eye, and the possible impact of directly viewing the eclipse. They also gained an understanding of the myth and the culture that created it.

Conclusion

The exemplary schools demonstrate that elementary school LEP students can learn challenging content in language arts while they are learning English. This general conclusion helps put to rest the unwarranted assumption that schools must wait to provide LEP students with ambitious curricula until after they have mastered English. The exemplary sites instead began with the conviction that mastering high quality curricula and acquiring English are best done together. To meet this challenge, the schools embarked on a process of restructuring and developed innovative curricular and instructional strategies and approaches.

Schoolwide Vision

The exemplary schools have all developed, often by means of an extended process, a schoolwide vision of what quality schooling should be like for all their students, including their LEP students. First, the schools expect that all their students can learn to high standards and can learn the language arts curriculum necessary for success. The attainment of fluency in oral and written English is assumed to be fundamental and achievable.

Second, these schools embrace the culture and language of the students, welcoming parents and community members into the school in innovative ways. This cultural validation helps break down alienation and enables the schools to create a climate of respect and acceptance. Third, the schools are understood to be a community of learners in which teachers are treated as professionals and given the time to develop programs and activities. It is a given that teachers of LEP students should be fluent in the native language of their students or trained in second language acquisition theory and practice. Continuing professional development is also considered essential to improving the educational programs.

Finally, the schools recognize the need for change to be schoolwide and comprehensive. They understood that the whole system of schooling needed to be re-examined in order to realize ambitious goals for their students. The structure and content of the curriculum, the instructional paradigm and learning environments, language development strategies, the organization of schooling, the use of time, and school decision-making are all seen as interconnected.

Language Acquisition and Development

All the exemplary schools have adopted the twin goals of having LEP students achieve English language fluency and master the content of the core curriculum provided for all students. Some schools have added a third goal of developing and maintaining students' fluency in their native language. Whether or not maintenance in the native language is sought, the exemplary schools vary in their approach to English language acquisition.

The demographics of the LEP students at the school, the desires of the community, the vision for the school, the availability of qualified staff, as well as district and state policies, are all factors that influence each school's approach.

However, some important similarities among the schools emerge. All schools use students' primary language—either as a means of developing literacy skills or as a tool for delivering content, or both. In many cases, teachers also rely on high-quality sheltered instruction. Sheltered instruction and primary-language-based programs are typically complemented by ESL instruction. In addition, content-area instruction is integrated into bilingual and sheltered programs for LEP students and used as a means of providing a context for oral and written language production in English.

All the language development programs are flexibly constructed to accommodate students with varying levels of fluency and, where appropriate, students from different language backgrounds. Rather than using a single model for all LEP students, teachers adjust curriculum, instruction, and the use of primary language to meet the varying needs of students. Such flexibility is necessary because of the diversity of students, and the key to flexibility is having qualified and trained staff. In most classrooms with LEP students, teachers are trained in second language acquisition. In all cases where instruction occurs in the students' primary language, and in many cases where instruction is delivered using sheltered English, teachers are fluent in the language of their students. To promote interaction between LEP and English-only students, teachers team teach and employ a wide range of grouping strategies.

Finally, the transition to mainstream classes from classes where instruction is delivered in students' primary language or through sheltered approaches is gradual, carefully planned, and supported with activities, such as after-school tutoring to ensure students' success at mastering complex content in English.

Curricular and Instructional Strategies

Each exemplary site has developed its own mix of curricular and instructional strategies to meet the challenge of language diversity in its own setting. However, across the exemplary sites, the strategies tend to be based on similar pedagogic principles and approaches to creating highly effective learning environments.

These innovative principles have been adopted to engage students actively in their own learning. Teachers have created nurturing learning environments where students could work independently and in heterogeneous, cooperative groups. The goal of this approach is to deliver a rich and varied curriculum to LEP students that parallels the curriculum delivered to other students at the same grade level. The language arts curricula use literature-based approaches that encourage LEP students to read, write,

and speak about topics relevant to their culture and experience, in conjunction with traditional strategies such as teaching the key sounds and grammatical rules of English. Moreover, by focusing on concepts over an extended period of time, teachers emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of knowledge.

Because the case studies focus on innovative attributes of exemplary sites, their innovations may appear beyond the reach of most schools serving LEP students. On the contrary, they should be viewed as examples of what can be done. The outstanding practices developed at these schools initially began as internal problem-solving searches. All the exemplary sites followed a self-reflective process to become better at meeting the complex challenges of language diversity. Yet, at no single exemplary site have all the elements of reform been realized to outstanding levels. However, the schools are committed to examining the reform progress on an ongoing basis and to making adjustments over time as they learn and conditions change. This iterative, reflective process may be the cornerstone for long-term success at these schools.

Note

1 In 1990, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify and study exemplary school reform efforts involving the education of language minority students. The RFP directed the study to focus on language arts in Grades 4 through 6 and math and science in Grades 6 through 8. The research reported on here is one of twelve related studies on school reform, all funded by OERI. The study analyzed the context of school reform and how school reform affects the schoolwide curriculum and program of instruction for LEP students. The study was conducted by the University of California, Santa Cruz, National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning in collaboration with BW Associates of Berkeley, CA, under contract No. RR91-17203. Barry McLaughlin and Paul Berman were the co-directors. The full study findings are reported in *School Reform and Student Diversity—Volume I: Findings and Conclusions; Volume II: Case Studies of Exemplary Practices for LEP students; and Volume III: Technical Appendix.* This paper presents findings on the way four exemplary schools implemented language arts programs in the context of school-reform-supported learning in Grades 4 through 6 for limited English proficient students. The author would particularly like to thank the principals and teachers of the four elementary schools for allowing us to study their schools and classrooms.

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